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The Ethical Commandment In The Decalogue Legislating Freedom

The Sixth Commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.

Despite the relative absence of outright murder in modern Western society, this Sixth Commandment is one of the most frequently disobeyed commandments in the Law of Moses.

Undoubtedly this commandment forbids violence as well as murder.

Undoubtedly, too, this commandment also forbids coercion. Coercion is a broader term than violence, because it covers violence that has been legalized as well as violence that is illegal; and it covers also subtle coercion unaccompanied by sound and fury.

The following three statements cover the same idea:

1. Thou shalt not kill.
2. Thou shalt not commit violence.
3. Thou shalt not coerce.

Not all present-day Christians accept the commandment in the comprehensive form of, Thou shalt not coerce; for example, some members of the Christian Reformed church do not.

The social gospel does not abhor coercion. Every social gospeller that we know, without exception, has a program which is nothing else eventually than the paradox of using coercion to accomplish an alleged brotherly love. If meekness is the antonym for coercion, then there is no real meekness in any social gospeller known to us.

Consider the Christian Labor Association, supported in part by collections in Christian Reformed churches. It favors compelling men to pay dues to a union, or making compensatory contributions, whether they wish to or not. This is nothing else than coercion, and is as plainly a violation of the Sixth Commandment as is murder.

The Sixth Commandment protects freedom as much as it protects life, or else there is nothing in the Second Table of the Ten Commandments in favor of freedom. The people who do not believe in freedom are the people who do not believe that the Sixth Commandment prohibits coercion, or they do not believe in the Commandments at all.

Freedom, as far as the Law of Moses goes, depends vitally on the Sixth Commandment. However, there is a second Commandment which also protects freedom.

The Theological Commandment In The Decalogue Legislating Freedom

Abraham was a great man on at least three counts:

1. He realized that his significance would depend in part on the mere number of his descendants. Apparently he had an intense wish that his descendants would be as the "sands of the sea and the stars of the heaven in number." That wish of his was promised to be fulfilled and has been fulfilled.

2. More significantly, he was clearheaded enough to realize that faith was more important than sight; that the correct explanation of the world is as important as the world itself; that neither atheism nor agnosticism ultimately "makes sense"; that "faith is a *conviction* of things not seen"; that the universe is meaningless unless there is a Creator; from things seen, that which is material, Abraham's thought jumped boldly to that which is not seen, the world of the mind (the spiritual).

3. Further still more significantly, he was a solitary monotheist, in an environment of universal polytheism. He believed in *one* God. By this he gave evidence of being an independent and powerful thinker. To him the universe must have appeared a unity, not explainable by a multiplicity of petty and local deities, and certainly not by a "material" God, but one invisible and unfathomable. Modern knowledge has liquidated polytheism. The only religion which can survive must, as Abraham clearly realized long ago, be monotheistic.

The multiplicity of gods and the creation of gods in the form of images were best ridiculed centuries after Abraham by one of his descendants, the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah argues against images as gods by saying that a man picks up two sticks or two pieces of wood. The one he burns for heat, and the other he carves into a god! How can such a carved stick of wood be a god which, except for the arbitrary and capricious choice of the man, would have been consigned to the fire? Something created by man cannot be god.

Polytheism and idols are now historically things of the past, but has the First Commandment beginning with the challenging statement, "Hear, O Israel, your God is one God," become meaningless? Modern ministers may be rather hard pressed to find good examples of present-day violations of the First Commandment, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. But modern man has false gods just as the ancient Canaanites had.

The Distinction Between Power And Authority

A distinction should be made between power and authority.

1. Power is the ability to act, or capacity for action; both right or wrong, both legal or illegal.

2. Authority is defined in the dictionary as "legal or rightful power." But what is legal may not necessarily be right. This definition of authority therefore contains an ambiguity. The church of which we are members considers all legalized power to be authority.

3. Authority, in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, is used in a more restricted sense; authority, as we use the term, means only rightful power. By *rightful* we mean what the Law of Moses says about what is rightful. If a civil law violates the Law of Moses that law does not have authority in our estimation; we must obey God rather than men.

Under compulsion we all submit to power. We have no choice. We may be led to the execution block. The very definition of power is that it has the capability of exercising force and doing so in order to accomplish its will. So-called authority which is merely legalized wrong is not authority for any devout Christian.

Submitting To Power As If It Were Authority Violates The First Commandment

But, when we submit to power *as if it were a legitimate authority,* then we perpetrate a violation of the First as well as the Sixth Commandment. Authority, according to the Hebrew-Christian religions, can stem only from actions in conformity with the Law of God. Only when we obey that Law, do we not have other gods

before us. But when we disobey that law, by accepting as authority someone or some organization which legislates or requires of us something contrary to the Law of God, and if we bow to that power as if it were authority, then we have indeed a false god before us.

If bald power alone is illegitimate, and if genuine authority is limited, all else must be reserved to liberty. The reward for that enormous reservation of complete liberty is indicated by, Blessed are the meek [who do not appeal to coercion] for they shall inherit the earth. We interpret "inherit the earth" as meaning temporal and earthly welfare and happiness.

Every invasion of liberty by power without genuine authority is a violation of the Sixth Commandment. But the situation becomes even worse if a power which restricts legitimate liberty is recognized as an authority; then not only has the Sixth Commandment been violated, but also the First, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

The broadest and most significant way to evaluate the First Commandment in our modern world is to consider it a commandment requiring resistance to all power which falsely claims the name of authority in order purposely or incidentally to violate any of the Commandments of God.

Unless we work to restrict power to the field of authority, and thereby promote liberty, we have opened the door for all kinds of modern gods — states, unions, dictators, monopolies, cartels, synods, general assemblies, church councils. These are the modern Baals and Ashtoreths, except when they obey the Commandments of God. For some of them the requirement to obey the Law of God will practically mean that they have to go out of existence.

People Should Be Classified Not As Capitalists Or Socialists But As FOR Or AGAINST The Law Of God

On all sides we hear about capitalism. People say, capitalism is this or capitalism is that.

What is capitalism?

Big banking? Mass production and distribution? Freedom to live your own economic life? Prosperity? Exploitation? Private ownership of the means of production? Free markets?

Karl Marx essentially defined capitalism as a system of freedom by which the strong can and do exploit the weak. The definition is false.

If you are in favor of capitalism, of what are you in favor? If you are against capitalism, what are you against?

Our definition of capitalism is this: freedom except in so far as freedom is restricted by the Law of Moses (the Decalogue).

Capitalism by this definition is merely a system of rules for human action — complete freedom except no freedom to do wrong. Those rules; nothing else.

Capitalism, as it is usually talked about, is a vague and general thing. Moses did not talk about capitalism. He was a man who may have mistrusted, or at least did not use, general terms such as capitalism or socialism; he did not give names to abstractions. He was right down to earth — he had certain basic rules for human action. There is no better way to strip all ethics, politics and economics down to reality than by operating according to mere rules of action.

In the final analysis, capitalism is either synonymous with Moses's rules or not. In the final analysis too, socialism and communism are either synonymous with Moses's rules or not.

Marx was perfectly clear about that question. For him, capitalism was Moses's rules, and he execrated them. Many modern Christians differ from Marx in that they think Moses's rules can be harmonized with socialism-communism. Marx would have ridiculed them.

Why not classify people, not on the basis that they are capitalists or socialist-communists, but instead on the basis of agreeing with the Law of Moses or disagreeing with the Law of Moses? That is the best classification in the world.

If you think the real classification is capitalists versus socialists, rather than *for* the Law of God or *against* the Law of God,

then you should give thought to the question whether you have been able to relate the Law of God significantly to the issue of capitalism versus socialism.

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is a pro-Law-of-God publication, and is a pro-capitalist publication exactly as far as capitalism agrees with the Law of God. As none of the principles of socialism can be reconciled with the Law of God, we are wholly anti-socialist.

A Small Investor's Hedge Against Inflation

(This article is a follow-up on what has been written in earlier issues about a man protecting himself during inflationism from reduction or even destruction of the purchasing power of his savings.)

The small investor is almost always an uninformed and inexperienced investor. An investor with much funds to invest either acquires experience, employs guidance, or has a big enough account so that he can turn the whole job over to the trust department of a bank or a similar institution.

No one can afford to be careless with his money, but the less a man has, the more conservative he should probably be. Not even the rich willingly risk all their assets in one investment. They diversify as much as they can; there is considerable protection from such diversification. A small investor does not have enough assets to diversify.

The consequence of this is that a small investor feels restricted to accumulate his savings in (1) savings accounts in banks, (2) in building and loan association deposits, in (3) insurance, in (4) government bonds, in (5) municipal and other bonds, in (6) mortgages, or (7) simply in a checking account carrying no interest. In every one of the situations mentioned this small investor is a creditor, a lender, because he lets others use his money.

However, if he buys a house or a farm "on time" he becomes a debtor. That is about the only circumstance in which he finds himself as a debtor *in regard to investments;* (we are here ignoring

debts incurred to buy consumer goods as automobiles, furniture, and mechanical household equipment; we are here considering investments made for income purposes and to establish a so-called "nest egg," that is, future purchasing power).

If a small investor goes to a competent advisor such as a trust officer in a bank, the latter will feel constrained to be "conservative" and will recommend some bond or investment in insurance. It takes an uncommon amount of courage to advise a small investor to buy "things" rather than to invest in a conservative "call on dollars," which dollars unfortunately are shrinking all the time in purchasing power because of inflationism.

The small investor then is at a serious disadvantage in an inflationary economy; he lacks exactly the experience and skills which he really needs. This is bad for a typical young married man, but is far worse for the typical widow or spinster or for a girl trying to save in anticipation of marriage; what does the typical woman know about risk investments, such as investments in stocks?

As the economist of a great city bank once said: "In an inflationary economy the substantial, conservative people never do well; they invest too conservatively." But for a small investor there appears to be no other option than always to be "conservative."

In such a plight what can the small investor do to "hedge against inflation"?

In the latest thirty years a type of investment has been developed which appears the least unsatisfactory to a small investor or to any uninformed investor whether large or small. We refer to the so-called Investment Trusts.

A small investor's procedure might be as follows:

1. He buys 100 shares of stock in an investment trust at say $20 a share, or $2,000 worth.

2. By doing that he becomes the part owner of the shares of a large number of well established corporations, usually the so-called "blue chips." It is the function of investment trusts to *diversify* their investments. The trust buys with the funds it receives from our investor and from others like him additional shares in the same companies or in still other companies. It is as

if all the people in a town pooled their resources and bought stocks in 50 different companies. If one man puts in $2,000 worth of money, then that would be spread over the 50 companies in the pool. He would have, for so small an investment, an astonishing diversification.

3. As the 50 companies whose stock was owned by the investment trust paid dividends to it, it would pay dividends proportionately to each of its stockholders, after first deducting its own expenses. The deduction is for the services of the trust. To some the fee for this may appear to be expensive, but undoubtedly experience has proved that it is about right, namely 12½ to 15% of the gross dividends received. If the gross dividend yield on the trust's investments is 5%, and if 15% of that must be deducted for services, then the cost of the service is ¾ of one percent. The resulting return is 4¼% (5% - ¾% = 4¼%), or better than for many bonds.

4. But there should be other income for the investor over a period of time, namely, gains in the price of securities of the 50 companies whose stocks are held. If such stocks are sold from time to time, the customary practice (in order to save on taxes) is to pay out the gains *pro rata*. If some stock is not sold, and if the market price of that stock increases, then that enhances the value of the stock of the Investment Trust. It is from the gains and the higher prices that the investor has a partial hedge against inflation. Assume that over a number of years the average increase in market price of the underlying stocks is 5%. What then is the return to the investor? It is the 4¼% previously mentioned plus the 5%, or a total of 9¼%. Part of this is not real income but is an offset against inflation, but that is exactly what the small investor (every investor, in fact) needs. There will also be a deduction for capital gains which must be paid as income taxes.

5. A further advantage of this type of investment is its marketability. If the investor wishes to convert his investment into cash, he can sell it either (1) back to the investment company itself, or (2) to someone else through a broker.

6. There are two types of investment trusts; the Open End and the Closed End.

The Open End companies, if an investor is selling, buy in their own stock at the market value of the underlying securities on that day, and sell underlying securities in order to get the funds to do that. The Open End companies recover part of their costs for buying and selling for you by charging you 12½ or 15% *over* the market price of the underlying securities *when you first buy.* This is part of your "service charge." However, you get the full price without any deduction when you sell.

The Closed End trusts do not buy back their own stocks; you sell or buy the stock of the Trust through a broker, "at the market"; the Closed End trusts can be bought and sold only by paying a commission. The stock market price of the Closed End companies often varies considerably from the market value of the underlying assets; some sell for more than the value of underlying assets; others for less.

7. Small investors may wish to go to their banker and ask him what investment trusts to consider. Of course, there is no "sure thing" in this world; all investments have their hazards. Investors who invest directly in stocks or indirectly in investment trusts should remember that prices on the stock market are highly variable. That is inevitable. When buyers are more eager than sellers, prices rise; when sellers are more eager than buyers, prices decline. Stocks can easily fluctuate 30% above or below a purchase price — a fluctuation which may appear to be mere chance. Purchasers must be prepared for that vicissitude. If in one year the price goes up maybe 30%, that does not prove you are wise; and if the price goes down 30%, that does not prove you are a fool. Whoever invests in stocks must be prepared to be a gainer or loser by "chance" over relatively short periods of time. But if one invests steadily year in — year out, then the chance factors should neutralize each other; an investor will be "lucky" one year and "unlucky" the next; in the "long run" he should be substantially ahead.

8. In a short period of time an investment in "things" (stocks) may do badly. Over a longer period it should do well — assuming continued inflation caused by inflationism. The assumption of continuing inflationism is the only reasonable one. Every economy in the history of man has eventually inflated until ruined,

unless it was on a gold or precious-metal standard. We in the United States are not on a gold or precious-metal standard today. All history, then, foretells that we shall have continued inflationism. Astute investors expect it. It is wise to hedge as well as you can against what all prior history indicates will happen in the United States, unless the country goes back again to a gold standard. Few people wish that; still fewer consider it feasible; we are, therefore, blithely on our way to disaster.

9. Eventually, there is practically no sure "hedge" whatever against the consequences of inflationism. Scripture says, Your sins will find you out. That is true of nations as well as individuals.

Definitions Of Egoism, Egotism, Selfishness, Altruism

A Funk and Wagnalls [F&W] Standard Dictionary and the Concise Oxford [CO] Dictionary define the four words constituting the title of this article as follows:

EGOISM: The doctrine that the supreme end of human conduct is the perfection or happiness of the *ego,* or self; and that all virtue consists in the pursuit of self-interest. In loose usage, the part of the theory or practice of conduct or duty that has reference to oneself, as distinguished from *altruism.* — [F&W] Theory that treats self-interest as the foundation of morality; systematic selfishness; self-opinionatedness. — [CO]

EGOTISM: The habit or practise of thinking and talking much of oneself, or the spirit that leads to this practise; self-exaltation. — [F&W] Too frequent use of "i" and "me"; practice of talking about oneself; self-conceit; selfishness. — [CO]

SELFISHNESS: The quality of being selfish; undue regard for one's own interest, regardless of others. Syn.; self-love. *Self-love* is a due care for one's own happiness and well-being, which is perfectly compatible with justice, generosity, or benevolence toward others; *selfishness* is an undue or exclusive care for one's own comfort or pleasure, regardless of the happiness, and often of the rights, of others. Self-love is necessary to high endeavor, and even

to self-preservation; *selfishness* limits endeavor to a narrow circle of intensely personal aims, destroys all tender sympathies, and is ultimately fatal not only to the welfare but to the happiness of him who cherishes it. — [F&W] SELFISH: Deficient in consideration for others, alive chiefly to personal profit or pleasure, actuated by self-interest, (of motives etc.) appealing to self-interest (*theory of morals,* that pursuit of pleasure of one kind or another is the ultimate spring of every action). — [CO]

ALTRUISM: Devotion to the interests of others; disinterested benevolence: opposed to egoism. — [F&W] Regard for others as a principle of action. — [CO]

In this analysis egotism which is foolish if not sinful is not being considered; egoism is. In this analysis, too, selfishness in the bad sense given by Funk and Wagnalls is not being considered either. We are considering selfishness only as having the same meaning that egoism has; we are following the Oxford dictionary which defines egoism as selfishness. Heretofore we have used selfishness rather than egoism because it is the forthright Anglo-Saxon word, and consequently more challenging than the Latin word, egoism. Hereafter we shall use egoism and selfishness interchangeably.

Everybody who understands what the dictionaries say about egoism will understand what we mean by selfishness, namely, something pertaining to the self is the honestly admitted customary motivation for action.

The social gospel and communism both set up altruism as the main standard of conduct. There are people who say you sin except when you are altruistic; they set a sanctimonious and contra-Biblical standard.

The position being outlined in these issues of Progressive Calvinism is that egoism (self-interest, self-love, selfishness) is always the proper motivation on practical, everyday questions except when someone should engage in Biblical charity. It is only then that the motivation should be altruistic. Although we do not wish to be mathematical about it, we would say that the customary ratio should be 90% egoism and 10% altruism. Actually, circumstances should control; the standard should be 10% altruism as a minimum; increases above that should be pragmatic.

If a government enforced a 100% altruism, From each according to his ability to each according to his need, then a man would and could have no further material obligation to his neighbor.

The only point at which a man has an unlimited obligation to his neighbor, under the scriptural definition of neighborly love, is in connection with the gospel — that is, the obligation to help the neighbor get his thinking straight, on *all* matters, including his present and future spiritual welfare. Your neighbor's claim on you to be forewarned by you on everything that may be harmful to him is unlimited. Whereas the Christian religion does not require unlimited materialistic altruism, it is emphatic in its requirement of unlimited spiritual altruism; it demands helpful "public relations" more emphatically than any other religion and lifeview.

That is one of the most admirable features of this religion.

In the current issues we are considering only materialistic altruism.

Altruism Is Based On The Hallucination Of Omniscience, Or On Coercion

The living have wants. They are aware of those wants. They are motivated to act to satisfy those wants. The question is: should a man be altruistic in his motivations or egoistic; or, in slightly different phraseology, should a man be unselfish or selfish in his decisions and actions?

The answer to this question, if a man is to be realistic, is that the motivations must basically, because of the limitations of the human mind, be egoistic or selfish. There are people who pretend otherwise, but (1) they have deceived themselves, or (2) they would have us believe that they are better than they really are and (3) that they have more knowledge than they really have.

An idealism which consists in setting up altruism rather than egoism as the basically right motivation for conduct is always shipwrecked on either of two rocks, namely, (1) altruism requires coercion to accomplish its objective; or (2) altruism requires omniscience in order to make decisions for others, and thereby be altruistic. Both objections are final, but of these two the second is the more fundamental.

In the May issue we gave consideration to the impossibility of a mortal human being (in that case a housewife) really knowing what other human beings need; it is just that knowledge which is necessary to guide altruism. A woman shopping for her own family only will make mistakes in judgment compared to a perfectionist standard for shopping; but her task becomes an overpowering impossibility if she must consider, when she shops, the needs of all other families as well as her own.

We are continuing in this issue to describe the intellectual obstacles to employing altruism as the broad basis for action.

Later we shall discuss the relationship between altruism and coercion; it is when it becomes evident that omniscience does not exist that recourse is had to coercion. As human omniscience is a hallucination, the only ultimate basis for altruism is coercion.

What an incongruous combination: altruism and coercion!

And what an absurdity when the Christian religion teaches altruism, and consequently is committed to belief in human omniscience or in the validity of coercion!

The Character Of Our Choices

(continued from the May issue)

In the May issue we began consideration of how a family, consisting of a husband, wife and three children which had just moved to Chicago and which had an average net daily income of $20 ($7,300 a year), would spend (or allocate) that amount to various purposes, and under what limitations husband and wife would make their various decisions. Emphasis should be placed on the *net* income of $20 a day; that excludes income taxes and social security deductions; after those have been deducted there was still $20 a day left for husband and wife to allocate.

A description was given in the May issue of the decisions on the expenditure of $12 a day out of the total of $20. We allocated, in an illustrative manner, $4 a day for shelter; $2 a day

for tithe money; $5 for food; and $1 a day for gasoline. There is $8 yet to be allocated.

* * *

Last month in connection with a description of the purchasing of foodstuffs for her family, we gave consideration to the intellectual impossibility of the wife considering the needs of her "neighbors" as well as her own. She literally could not know the requirements of all the other households in Chicago and in the world for food. To know that, she would have required a practically omniscient mind, which she certainly does not have. She could not be her "neighbors' keeper" even if she might wish to be. Merely using common sense, it is obvious that God alone can undertake the task of being some mortal man's keeper. No other mortal man should undertake to be his "neighbors' keeper"; he will be undertaking something, first, beyond his knowledge, and, second, beyond his ability to "keep" his neighbor. If the so-called Christian religion teaches that we are our "brothers' keepers" and should act accordingly, then it makes itself a laughing stock for teaching that impossible and silly doctrine.

The idea that Scripture teaches that we are our "brothers' keepers" stems from a rhetorical question by the first murderer, Cain, whose question was itself a lie because it misstated the issue. Supposed "legislation" from that base source and occasioned by criminal circumstances under which the question arose should not be regarded as the supreme rule for relations among men. Cain was as bad a legislator as he was a bad brother.

The Intellect Precedes The Will, Even In Moral Questions

Altruism, which most people believe is a wonderful thing, should in significant respects be classed with collectivism, including socialism and communism. The foundation underlying all these "isms" is the same, namely an exaggerated estimate of what the human mind can know. The exaggerated estimate of what men can know is a notorious, conscienceless, contrary-to-fact arrogance, or as the ancient Greeks would have called it, a *hubris*.

The feasibility of altruism is not, in the final analysis, a question of the will, or of motivation, or of brotherly love; it is

instead a question of the intellect. The opposite of altruism, namely, egoism (self-love, selfishness) is not, in the final analysis either a question of the will, or of motivation, or of the lack of brotherly love; it too is instead a question of the intellect.

Merely for the sake of stating clearly the issue involved, let us for a moment grant (what is not in reality granted) that a man ought to be his brother's keeper; that is, be altruistic; and that he ought to be ready to stake his reputation for manifesting brotherly love on being nonselfseeking and on acting on the principle, from himself according to his ability to everybody else according to their needs. He has, let us assume (although it is generally contrary to fact) the altruistic, socialistic, social gospel motive; his will is to act according to an altruistic rather than an egoistic principle. His attitude will be a sinless one, according to this idea.

But even if he has that will to be altruistic, and by being altruistic presumably to be sinless, can he really accomplish that altruism despite the perfection of his will and the sinlessness of his motivation? The answer must be an unqualified no. Though his will be perfect, his mind is finite. No man knows enough to be an altruist in all his dealings. To be an altruist implies that you know better than others what their needs are and the proper way to satisfy their needs.

But these ideas are generalities to most people. It is desirable therefore to give detailed consideration to a specific case and see how impossible it is, for intellectual rather than moral reasons, to be altruistic.

Consider the question of a *just* price. Of course, we are all in favor of a just price. But this is fine talk, and pious sentiment, except when we make an egoistic approach to the question of price determination. What popular moralists usually mean by a just price is meaningless, or if not meaningless, is certain to be evil.

The Tithe Is High Wisdom

Let us return to our newly arrived family in Chicago.

For one day's driving $1 was allocated to gasoline. Was the husband of the family a selfish sinner when he bought that dollar's worth of gasoline?

We have here a husband who, together with his family, thinks he needs transportation. He does not need it in the sense that his life depends upon it. But he needs the gasoline in order to get to work in a short time. The alternative is that it will take him two hours to walk to work and two hours to return home. But by automobile it is 15 minutes each way. He saves 3½ hours a day by driving an automobile. Maybe the husband should have walked to work and the $1 he is spending for gas should have gone to provide better street car service in Singapore; or maybe it should have gone for medical supplies in Nigeria. Was his decision to buy gasoline selfish in the sense of being sin?

There are three possible injustices or sins involved in having bought the gasoline at 33⅓c a gallon: (1) maybe it should not have been bought at all and the man should have walked to work; or (2) the price may have been unjustly low; or (3) the price may have been unjustly high.

If we are our "brothers' keeper" as the social gospel would have it, what should this husband do; decide not to buy gasoline? insist on buying at a higher price? or demand a lower price?

First, should he have walked and given the money to someone else?

In the May issue, the second allocation that was made of the total daily income of $20 was to charity, in the amount of $2, or 10% of the total. The 10% is obviously the Biblical tithe.

Consideration here being given to ethical questions is more of a logical character than Biblical, and the validity and adequacy of the tithe needs scrutiny. If it is inadequate, there is reason to believe the figure should be raised by, say, adding the $1 for gasoline to the charity allocation, and making the husband walk to work. Really, then, we are not talking merely of $1 for gasoline, but of the 4 hours walking. The "price" of the gasoline (together with the other costs of the car) consists in the time otherwise devoted to walking, wear of shoe leather, etc.

Let us first consider whether there should be any charity whatever, from a rational viewpoint.

Recently we sat in a meeting where $250,000 was "expected" from the largest company in the city, for a new $2,500,000 YMCA building. Of that amount $50,000 was requested at once. The company currently is not paying dividends to its stockholders. Why pay out a large sum to a "charity" when the stockholders are getting nothing?

It was decided not to make a current contribution, but nevertheless the argument in favor of doing so had considerable force.

One man argued: new YMCA facilities are needed; young people should have a wholesome place for athletics. If the people do not *voluntarily* provide such facilities, then the municipality will. Then the operation will cost more, be less efficient, will be government controlled, and the cost will be in the taxes. The citizens will have to pay involuntarily what they could have had at less cost voluntarily.

The logical argument for charity gets down to this: *If citizens do not individually and collectively do voluntarily on their own initiative certain things which are really needed in communal life, then there will be group action taken which makes it compulsory and puts the power in the hands of the government. If the government is to be kept in bounds, then one of the devices to restrict government expansionism is voluntary charity to help the afflicted, to provide education, and to support religion.*

Sir, you will pay for it one way or another, and so you had better do it in the way you can get the most for your money, and can control it best yourself.

We are of the opinion that no good society can exist without there being charity. Charity is a necessary institution, and not an arbitrary religious requirement. Charity is one form of the highest wisdom in the affairs of men. Cheat on charity, and the government will take over, and you will then have mal-administered, expensive and even wasteful charity. Laugh at the tithe if you wish, but you will not laugh in the end. You will eventually discover that you were unwise. By not voluntarily contributing you failed to help people genuinely in need, you lost public good will, and after having lost face and character in the community, you had to participate in the end in aid which was not really charity, and which was provided by funds extorted from you by the tax gatherer.

* * *

There remains the question of the amount of the charity, or the percent it should be of your income.

The great lawgivers in the history of men have stated principles in unqualified terms. It is ordinarily not feasible to legislate about "degrees," and to say so much is good and so much is bad. Nevertheless, charity is a problem of "degree."

The gamut of the percent which should go to charity is anything from zero to 100 percent. A general rule is not stated anywhere in Scripture requiring the giving of 100 percent. One hundred percent would be voluntary communism, from each according to his ability to each according to his need.

Is the 10 percent specified by the Christian religion too low or too high?

Let us begin by considering the consequences of voluntary charity of 100 percent of a man's income. Is it for the welfare of men? It is not and it will be ruinous. Why? Because then no real *capital* will be accumulated, and the standard of living for mankind will be as primitive as Adam's was originally. His standard of living was very low *because he lacked capital* (See Progressive Calvinism, September 1957, page 266 ff.).

The *formation of capital* (involving saving) is voluntarily accomplished only by a limited number of people in any society. They are the accumulators by inclination or circumstance. The majority do not accumulate because of lack of inclination or unfavorable circumstances.

Capital consists of the man-made tools of production. Capital cannot come into existence unless someone decides not to spend today for present *consumers'* goods, in order to obtain *producers'* goods (capital) tomorrow and later which will make future production easier and more productive at that time. Capital formation obviously looks to the future; something which might be had presently is forgone in order to obtain more in the future. Someone who restricts his current consumption in order to develop capital, of which the greatest benefit by far accrues to the future

public and not to the saver, is then someone who is doing something *for others in the future*. That may not be his purpose, but it is the consequence. Capital formation is a form of present self-denial by the saver by which both the public and the saver will be benefited in the future at present cost to the saver.

If then, *current* charity is to be 100%, then that is practically identical with saying that the objects of all our self-denial are to be restricted to our contemporaries only; we in effect decide not to make contributions to future generations. Have we obligations only to our contemporaries and not to our successors? We ourselves profit greatly from what our ancestors have saved for us.

It might be argued that our redistribution on the principle of 100% charity will nevertheless result in present capital formation for the benefit of the future. We suggest an immediate test. Let everyone who believes it and who has assets immediately distribute them, or a test portion, widely in small amounts to all they know who have no assets, and then see how much *capital formation* there is on the part of the recipients. Practically everything given away under this plan will be spent by the recipients for consumer goods. Savings will practically be nil.

If someone says that 100% charity will not result in the discontinuance of capital formation, and if in support of his position he cites Russia as a country which despite its alleged principles is nevertheless engaging in the formation of capital, then the answer is that the Russian case is significantly different.

We are here assuming 100% *voluntary* charity. In Russia the so-called charity is imposed on the people against their will. The government, by adopting a five-year plan, or whatever they call it, simply refuses to let consumers' goods be made in the quantity that the public wishes, and instead *compels* present resources to be used for the formation of capital (producers' goods). If some people are *presently* starved in Russia in order to obtain the *future* gain resulting from the formation of capital, then that is not so much good will or love of the neighbor or future descendants as it is a determination to raise the war potential of Russia (accomplishable by the formation of capital). Experience in Russia would undoubtedly be that if charity up to 100% were exercised, and if there were no government compulsion, then capital formation would be about nil in Russia, too.

In any event, 100% *present* charity would be a death blow to any *future* charity which would be enjoyed in the form of the collossal benefits derived from the increased production obtained from the formation of capital.

We come then to the conclusion that to have no charity at all is folly, and to have 100% charity is suicidal for the development of mankind beyond the most primitive savagery. The proper percentage of income to charity must be somewhere between zero and 100%. We refuse to undertake to set a figure of our own. As individuals committed to the moral precepts of Scripture we accept the 10%, the tithe, as a standard. If the other parts of Hebrew-Christian ethics are inspired and meritorious, we see no reason to reject the tithe. If you do not like that yourself, set your own percentage. But we would advise you against adopting a zero percent for charity or anything near it, or a 100 percent for charity or anything near it.

The husband in our present illustration having allocated 10% ($2 a day) of his income to charity immediately after he had shelter for his family, has for our present purposes done his duty charity-wise, and is authorized to spend his $1 for gasoline so that he can ride to work and back in 30 minutes rather than walk four hours daily.

The Absurdity Of A Just Price Slogan

But is the price of the gasoline he buys *just?* Is he *selfish* when he buys gasoline at 33⅓c a gallon? Is the price too low or too high? How does he assuredly avoid a guilty conscience about not having paid a *just* price, and consequently of having been selfish?

While sitting in the pew in his church he has repeatedly heard the admonition to promote a *just* price. The *sin* of an unjust price has been registered indelibly on his mind. But no one has been specific on what was a just wage for him to receive, or a just price for him to pay. He believes devoutly in the word *justice* in regard to wages and prices, and he has inferred that the present wages and prices are unjust, but nobody has ever progressed beyond the word and told him how high (or low) the wage and the price should be. On Sunday he solemnly decides to insist on justice in

regard to his wages and in regard to the prices he pays, but on weekdays he is at a loss to know what is a just wage and a just price. And he certainly does not wish to be guilty of the sin of being "selfish" in what he earns or in what he pays out.

He is unable to remember a single instance when a just wage or price has been defined to him, other than that it is not the existing price; he knows at least that, because all economic unhappiness and distress is ascribed to injustice in wages and prices. The 33⅓c must be an unjust price merely because it is an existing price! The evidence that the existing price must be unjust is inferred from the fact that there are rich people in the world and poor people in the world; *that* is proof of injustice. Further, the injustice done to some does not find its origin in the conduct of people in regard to themselves. It is a certainty that they have been unjustly treated, simply because they are weak relative to those who are strong. The strong, then, have set prices and wages which enrich the strong and impoverish the weak. Liberty is a bad thing!

The husband decides to discover what is a just price for gasoline. The first thing he wishes to learn is whether the man who is worth a million dollars is getting the lowest price at the corner filling station, and further, whether the poorest man in the neighborhood is paying the highest price, that is, are the strong taking advantage of the weak? When he gets his dollar's worth of gas he gets out of the car to ask questions. He notes that the posted price is 33⅓c a gallon.

He speaks to the filling station attendant: "Does everybody pay that price?"

The man looks up and grins: "Why yes," he says. "What makes you ask that?"

"You mean that the richest man in the neighborhood does not, because he is rich, get a lower price?" the husband asks.

"No, why should he; anyway, I do not know who my richest customer is. How *could* I know?"

"You mean that the poorest man in the neighborhood does not, because he is poor, pay a higher price than 33⅓c a gallon?" the husband asks.

"No, why should he; and anyway, how can I know who is the poorest customer I have; maybe he is some young fellow driving a fine car bought on time. Listen, everybody buying here pays 33⅓c a gallon for this grade of gasoline."

"Well if the richest man does not buy cheaper and the poorest man does not buy dearer, and everybody is paying 33⅓c whether rich or poor, then that equal price may be unjust. Have you ever thought of changing that, so that the richer your customer is the more you charge him and the poorer he is, the less you charge him? Maybe that would be a *just* price. That is the 'ability to pay' principle which underlies the progressive income tax; the higher the income, the higher the tax rate; they say that that is justice. Maybe you should price gasoline on the same basis, and charge more, the richer the customer is; and less, the poorer the customer is. There ought to be a *just* price you know. Whatever a just price is, it is not the present price. This free market that we have on gasoline and other things enables the strong to exploit the weak. The proof is that the strong are rich and the weak are poor. Prices maybe, in order to be *just,* should be different for your different customers."

The idea sounds new to the filling station attendant. Yes, he goes to church occasionally; he regularly sends his children to Sunday school. He remembers having heard something in church about a just price, but he has never paid attention to it. It sounded theoretical and silly to him. He could make nothing out of it.

He retreats a step or two to get a good look at his new customer. A queer fellow, apparently. Maybe crazy. Wants to vary prices by customers! How could he handle that! He says:

"Mister, I cannot vary my prices by customers, because I would immediately lose every one whom I tried to charge more than the prevailing market price of 33⅓c. They would stop a half block up the highway and buy from my competitor. Anyway, how can I know who is rich and who is poor? Some rich people whom I know drive small cars. Some poor people I know drive some mighty fancy cars. I do not see their income tax return, nor know what real estate or securities they own. The government maybe knows what they earn. I do not. And as for giving a price lower than 33⅓c to the poor, where will that let me out?

I'll keep only customers who pay 33⅓c *or less.* Further, all the poor people buying elsewhere will flock to me. I'll be selling all my gas at less than 33⅓c. Do you want me to go broke? It will not work, mister, because even the rich will come to me and say that they are poor and want the lower price. How can I depend on what people say? Listen, the price here for everybody has got to be the competitive market price of 33⅓c a gallon, or three gallons for a dollar. A dollar, please."

The husband drives off. He thinks hard about what moral teachers can mean by a just wage and a just price. He concludes that it cannot be a variable price. The filling station cannot successfully discriminate against the poor or the rich. Neither will tolerate it. The price will have to be uniform to all customers at a given station, and also at different stations, quality of gas and service considered. Anyway, *one* conclusion can be reached. It will not be possible to have a variable price for so common a necessary as gasoline, or any other common necessary for that matter.

But that is a decisive and controlling conclusion. Uniform prices are practically inevitable in a free market *when customers can shop and buy where they wish.* Then maybe everybody is being robbed, rich and poor alike; or maybe everybody is robbing the dealers, rich and poor alike. But in any case it is impossible for the rich to be favored and the poor to be robbed.

Let us stop a minute and consider the implications of *freedom* in this case. It will be remembered that there is a basic criticism which Marx and the social gospel make against freedom, namely, that freedom is good for the strong but bad for the weak, because freedom permits the strong to exploit the weak.

It should be clear that in a free market, with *both* buyers and sellers really *free,* that the strong cannot buy nor sell better than the weak.

A service station owner or manager for a powerful oil company may decide to set his prices higher for some customers than others. That can have only one consequence: he will hurt nobody except himself. The customers whom he endeavors to charge excessively simply leave him; because they are free to do so, they do;

they do just that for the very good and virtuous reason that it is in their *selfish* or egoistic interests to do so. When they quit the dealer who wishes to charge them more than the prevailing market, nobody with a teaspoon of sense would consider them to be sinfully selfish.

In fact, freedom plus selfishness together, in the case just outlined, are what Von Mises refers to when he wrote in *Theory and History,* Yale University Press, 1957, page 169:

> The Christian historians and economists who reject capitalism as an unfair system consider it blasphemous to describe egoism as a means Providence has chosen in order to attain its ends.

Egoism or selfishness *plus freedom* are in our opinion exactly what Mises says, to wit: "the means Providence has chosen to attain its ends."

* * *

But let us consider the alternative to that glorious freedom which includes the right to selfishness.

Maybe we need instead a *controlled* market price. Then the price of gasoline will surely be just! The husband now begins to ponder that idea. A controlled price would be wonderful if the price would drop below 33⅓c. But a controlled price would be bad for himself if the price would be set higher than 33⅓c.

He thinks hard. The first question he says to himself is, *who* will control the price? Next, if I were the controller, how would I know what the *just* price is?

Suppose, he thinks, that I myself would become the gasoline czar of America. What would be the price that I would set on gasoline?

Suppose that I raised the price to 40 cents. What would make that price *just?*

What reason can I think up? Ah, here is an answer; some of the crude oil for my gasoline comes from the Near East (Arabian territory) and some from Venezuela. The price of 33⅓c is unjust because the Arabians and the Venezuelans are not getting

enough for their crude oil. Those undeveloped countries are being exploited by the pluto-democracies, as the United States. That is a good reason! If I were the gasoline czar, I would use that as an excuse to raise the price to 40c a gallon at retail. I have decided that that is a just price in order to give the Arabians and others more. If I were gasoline czar and did that, I can imagine a headline in the *New York Times* saying: "Gasoline Czar Raises Gasoline to *Just* Price of 40c." The subheading would be: "Says Arabians and Venezuelans Are Justly Entitled to Higher Crude Prices."

However, on further thought our man becomes aware that that will not hold water. The papers, he says to himself, report that the government has restricted crude oil imports from abroad because there is too much domestic crude. If I raise prices, domestic crude oil production will increase in response to that. If the price is too low on crude for the Arabians and Venezuelans, it must be too low for American crude oil producers too. But that cannot be. Domestic producers of crude oil are yammering to produce more at the present prices. If I would raise prices, and if another government department keeps cheaper foreign oil from coming in, then domestic producers will get the benefit of my decree on the 40c a gallon. Therefore, it is not possible that we are exploiting the Arabians and the Venezuelans. They get as much, after allowing for transportation, as the rich Texans are getting.* The 40c price must be wrong. Unjust! Too high!

* * *

Well, if the price of 33⅓c is unjust, and if a higher price cannot be proven to be more just, then a *just* price must be lower than 33⅓c a gallon. The husband proposes to cut the price to 25c a gallon. Then, he says to himself, I shall get four gallons for $1, instead of only three.

*The *Wall Street Journal* (May 16, 1958) had this news on page 1. "Crude oil production in Texas during June will be held to an eight-day schedule under an order issued by state regulatory authorities. This will be the third consecutive month in which the oil flow will be restricted to this record low in terms of producing days. Some crude oil purchasers had favored increased quotas and many in the industry had looked for June production of nine or ten days."

But as gasoline czar he needs to substantiate, in a society operating according to the social gospel, that the 25c a gallon price is more *just* than the 33⅓c price. How can he do that?

A drop in price from 33⅓c to 25c a gallon is an 8⅓c reduction per gallon, or in percentage a 25% reduction in the price. Somebody is certainly going to be in distress from that large reduction; the question is, *who* will be required to take the cut.

There are an almost endless number of people: (1) the retail service station operator, (2) the employes of that operator, (3) his landlord who owns the station and to whom he pays rent; or (4) the wholesaler from whom he buys, (5) the wholesaler's delivery men or office help, (6) his suppliers. If the service station operator buys directly from a big oil company or if the station is the property of a big oil company, then (7) the big oil company may have to take the cut, or (8) its employes, or (9) its suppliers, or (10) the farmers from whom the oil company obtains leases on a royalty basis, or (11) the railroad that transports oil.

In so far as various corporations take the cut, (12) the United States government will probably absorb half of it, because the income tax rate for corporations is 52% of profits before taxes.

Or the individuals who will have to absorb the 8⅓c cut may be (13) the plumbers who helped build refineries, or (14) sailors who work on tankers, or (15) retailers in business in oil towns, or (16) the people who manufacture tanks and pipes and who dig pipe lines, or (17) every government which draws taxes from the existence of property associated with the oil industry; and on and on almost endlessly.

Any man contemplating setting the price of gasoline at 25c when the prevailing market price is 33⅓c must be able to substantiate that there is behind the 33⅓c price an injustice of some sort, and he must be able to be specific about it, or else he is purely arbitrary. Otherwise, what is *just* is nothing more than his mere *ipse dixit,* his mere personal say-so. There is no proof whatsoever.

We come then to the conclusion that in regard to a just price for gasoline the only being who knows what a just price is for gasoline is the Lord God Almighty himself because He only

will know how to distribute justly the 8⅓c reduction in price among the millions of people who have participated in the production of the gasoline being sold. He can know whether the farmer is getting too much for his leases, the stockholders too much as dividends, the delivery men too much in wages, the contractors building refineries too much for construction, the steam fitters too much for their work, the service station operator too much in salary, etc., etc., etc. An omniscient mind is needed, a mind that *knows* all, the mind of God and of God only.

Let us assume that God concerns himself with a just price for gasoline in May 1958 in the United States of America in Chicago, Illinois. If so, has He told anybody? Whispered it in some union boss's ear, or some business tycoon's, or some bureaucrat's, or some preacher's or some sociology professor's? If He did not communicate in a special manner with these favored people, how can they know?

Or, where did they go to school to learn what a just price is? Who told the professors in the school what a just price is?

Or do some people have charismatic powers — that is, have they had bestowed on them a "gift or power bestowed by the Holy Spirit for use in the propagation of the truth, or the edification of the church" so that the church can proclaim to the world specifically what a just price is for gasoline, in Chicago, of a certain quality, in May 1958?

To ask the question is to have the answer; all the prattle about a just price is a playing with words. It is pious, sanctimonious meaninglessness. It is a lamentable atavism to the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. When the church talks of a just price it is absolutely certainly talking about something that does not exist, unless it means a price based on the Commandments of God, specifically, the Commandment, Thou shalt not kill.

A Just Price Depends On, Thou Shalt Not Kill

There is indeed a just price if it is based on the Sixth Commandment, but only if that condition is met. Others might base their definition of a just price on the Commandments, Thou shalt

not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet. But those commandments are relatively unimportant in determining a just price.

The price of gasoline, in our illustration, was 33⅓c per gallon. We saw that it was essentially (ignoring usually temporary so-called "price wars") the prevailing price. All gasoline in a given community, if of uniform grade, would be selling at that price. Injustice in regard to the price would, therefore, have to be in regard to that generally prevailing price.

The commandments against theft and fraud would be operative to prevent injustice in specific cases, by theft or by fraud on the part of an individual dealer. These cases of injustice would be individual cases. But the question of a just price for gasoline is a question pertaining to the generally prevailing price charged by all dealers to everybody. Some of these dealers may be honored members of a church. Are they great sinners in regard to an "unjust price" when they sell gasoline at 33⅓c per gallon, the *prevailing* price?

It depends on whether the price was determined by coercion of anyone; or, in contrast to that, was determined by full freedom of all concerned. The price was just, if it was established by selfishness plus freedom; or if you wish, by egoism plus freedom. It was unjust if it was established by government decree, or by any coercion by a participant in the process of supplying or purchasing gasoline.

What is the alternative to freedom plus egoism? There is only one alternative, namely, coercion under the pretense of having enough knowledge to exercise altruism. These are the only possibilities: (1) the pretense or hallucination of loving the neighbor more than the self plus coercion to enforce it on others; or (2) the sincerity of self-interest, of egoism, of legitimate selfishness plus *freedom not only of yourself but of all others too.*

Egoism is monstrous if it is exercised without freedom of others to react defensively against it. Egoism is wonderful, if it is exercised in a framework of complete freedom of others to react defensively against it.

We revert to the Sixth Commandment. It forbids more than murder; it forbids violence; it goes even further and forbids coercion. Therefore, a man's egoism may induce him to pursue his self-interest, but it may never permit him to coerce his wishes on his neighbors. On this basis, there is perfect harmony between the Sixth Commandment and the Beatitude which reads, Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Those who insist on avoiding coercion are the meek.

Let us reconsider the 33⅓c price for gasoline. Thousands, indeed millions of people participate in the process directly or indirectly, of supplying gasoline. Gasoline is in a sense woven into the whole life of America. What alone can make the price right, *just?* Only one thing, namely, that neither buyer nor seller at the various stages of the process, directly or indirectly in all its ramifications, coerces his will on anyone else.

Take the farmer who bargains for a big royalty on wells to be drilled and oil to be produced on his land. When is his take "just"? Only if he does not use coercion. He can always say *no.* It will be, or should be, a sovereign no. Nobody should have the power to compel him to accept what is offered to him. That act of coercion is wrong. Similarly, he should not be in a position to compel others to deal with him.

Freedom exists in proportion as there are a multiplicity of options available. The more buyers and sellers that there are the greater the range of freedom. If Oil Company X does not wish to pay more than 10c a barrel royalty, the farmer should be at liberty to reject it; maybe some other company may offer him more, and maybe not; to act or not to act and on what terms to act must be every individual's inalienable right.

The price resulting from that set of conditions is the just price. There is no other just price possible, except God impose it, because He is omniscient and knows what the wishes are of every man participating in the operation; that is, an omniscient mind makes the decision that would otherwise have been arrived at by *noncoercion* in a *free* market. But unless such an omniscient mind intervenes, any determination of price contrary to what it would be under the freedom just mentioned would be an unjust price.

But note what has happened under this situation of freedom. It all turns on a basic assumption, namely, that self-interest (egoism, selfishness or more accurately *self-decision*) controls the action of every participant. What a nasty mess the whole operation would be if everyone was not considering his own self-interest on which he does have information, but only the self-interest of others on which he has meager information or on which he is completely ignorant. Society becomes "rational" only if the participants act on the basis of what is known to them. We know our own needs, and to a lesser extent those of others very closely associated with us, but from there on our knowledge fades out rapidly.

And the alternative? There is only one. God obviously does not directly intervene in the pricing process on gasoline in Chicago (except in the general laws of nature and man) and so there is no omniscient mind setting the price. Therefore, if a free market plus egoism is considered to be a defective method to arrive at a just price, then the only alternative is the edicts of some authorized coercer who may think he is omniscient but who is not; or else, various power groups will exercise coercion to get for themselves what the free actions of their fellows would not give them. These alternatives all violate the Sixth Commandment, Thou shalt not

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coerce. As was said before, the Sixth Commandment legislates freedom. The exercise of that freedom should have that boundary which is set by what *can be known* by the puny mind of each individual participant.

Deny freedom as specified by the Sixth Commandment, and then what? Can any just price be established? It is an impossibility!

The demand for a *just* price should be changed to a demand for a *free* price, because it is the *free* aspect of price determination that makes a price just.

But are Christians willing to turn from *talk* about a just price to *action* based on the Sixth Commandment? Our experience has not made us optimistic on that.

(to be continued)

A friend recently criticized the title of this publication, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. He objects to the word *Calvinism*. He considers it sectarian and narrow. He says that what is written pertains to all Christianity. When we founded PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM we pondered the problem. Maybe we selected our restrictive name unwisely, but we do not know enough about *all* branches of Christianity.

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